MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION:  
How Government, Business, and Non-Governmental Leaders  
Transform Complex Challenges into New Possibilities

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A One Earth Future Research Report

A hallmark of the contemporary international system is the complexity of problems facing actors today. Yet creative facilitators can build bridges between a wide array of actors to address these most difficult challenges. Multi-stakeholder collaboration (MSC) is a complex process often necessarily involving parties with highly divergent interests and individuals with little to no collaborative experience. This report simplifies the complexity of collaboration by exploring five essential elements: Purpose, People, Place, Process, and Practice.

**Purpose**
MSC enables stakeholders to think, feel, and act together in innovative ways that allows new possibilities for the future to unfold.

**People**
The MSC enterprise weaves together the stakeholders’ different perspectives and capacities to generate new possibilities in support of superordinate goals.

**Place**
Venues must generate a sense of belonging and promote a relaxed environment. Facilitators can acknowledge the diversity of voices in a MSC forum and articulate that everyone belongs there.

**Process**
Facilitators should work closely with stakeholders to discuss the root causes driving challenges; shared stakeholder interests; and what is needed to move the issue forward.

**Practice**
MSC skills aren’t just conceptual understandings, but performance skills learned through practice. Stakeholders learn how to embody collaborative behavior so that it becomes second nature.
**CASE STUDIES**

**AFGHANISTAN:**

The Afghanistan case study describes a multi-stakeholder collaboration in the heat of an ongoing conflict with initial isolated pockets of collaboration. As applied to immediate concerns, the MSC principles enabled a more inclusive group of stakeholders to coalesce around mutual concerns producing tangible results. For example, our assessments showed that security conditions improved where we instituted collaborative programs. The improved security environment allowed Afghans to bring goods to market and generate income to provide for their basic needs. Improved communication between rural areas, the central government and other stakeholders resulted in the rebuilding of 40 districts and 100 rural villages in less than two years.

**PACIFIC AREA SPECIAL OPERATIONS CONFERENCE (PASOC):**

PASOC brought together around 300 stakeholders, including government leaders from 22 countries, academics, think tank analysts, business consultants, religious scholars, social activists, members of the media, and senior policymakers. We met to develop a shared understanding of the underlying causes of terrorism, to build relationships, and to coordinate innovative action in Asia. The MSC process worked well because it gave leaders needed time to step away from the intense busyness of their day-to-day lives to reflect on what is working well and what needs to improve. The process facilitated the emergence of new ideas, new connections, and new possibilities.

**OCEANS BEYOND PIRACY (OPB):**

Given the gaps in governance surrounding maritime piracy, One Earth Future Foundation created a collaborative team called Oceans Beyond Piracy. The OPB case study highlights the benefits of using a third party to help stakeholders strengthen a collaborative process from the outside in. OPB staff learned the importance of gaining support among senior leadership for collaborative processes. The OPB team worked with business, grassroots and technical groups to develop implementation plans and take action. Stakeholders respect OPB’s independent and balanced efforts because the facilitators enable all voices to be heard and help stakeholders appreciate one another’s diverse perspectives.

The One Earth Future Foundation was founded in 2007 with the goal of supporting research and practice in the area of peace and governance. The OEF discussion paper series is intended to promote interesting and thought-provoking ideas relevant to key questions of peace and global governance.

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